

The Role of Social Networking Sites for Language Learning in UK Higher Education: The Views of Learners and Practitioners

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The Role of Social Networking Sites for Language Learning in UK Higher Education: The Views of Learners and Practitioners

Billy Brick, Coventry University, UK

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to assess the potential for Social Networking Sites (SNSs) to play a role in language learning in the UK Higher Education (HE) sector. These sites are characterised by certain features including learning materials, synchronous and asynchronous video and text chat facilities, a peer review feature, and some sites also incorporate an award system, in the form of points (<http://www.livemocha.com>) or 'berries' (<http://www.busuu.com>). This serves to motivate participants by rewarding them for their progress and for their peer review activities. In order to consider if, or how, to integrate SNSs into the UK HE curriculum it is important to consider the views of practitioners and learners towards such sites and whether they consider them to have a potential role in HE language education. The paper will report on the outcomes of two small research projects which have sought to establish the view of both practitioners and students towards SNSs in the HE context. When considered overall the practitioners were more positive about the site than the learners.

Keywords: Language Learning, Learning Communities, Networked Learning, Social Networking, Tandem Learning, Web-Based Learning

INTRODUCTION

Educators have begun to discuss the effects of Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2005) on higher education. McLaughlin and Lee (2008) propose a dynamic student-led 'Pedagogy 2.0' curriculum which offers opportunities for learners to connect, share and discuss ideas (Conole & Alevizou, 2010, p. 10) and to challenge centralized models of learning. McLaughlin and Lee (2008, p. 1) define Pedagogy 2.0 as integrating 'Web 2.0

tools that support knowledge sharing, peer-to-peer networking, and access to a global audience with socioconstructivist learning approaches to facilitate greater learner autonomy, agency, and personalization.' SNSs for language learning allow learners to share knowledge through peer-reviewed activities and enable them to network internationally through language exchange. Furthermore, SNSs allow learners to personalise their learning and increase their autonomy by being able to access the sites at any time of the day or night.

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The utilisation of Web 2.0 tools leads to individual learner empowerment (Rogers et al., 2007; Sims, 2006; Sheely, 2006) and provides the opportunity for the development of personal Learning Environments (PLEs). However, Banyard, Underwood, Kerlin, and Stiller (2011) argue that although PLEs have clear benefits in terms of communication and collaboration, their benefits in terms of learning should not be taken for granted. Gouseti (2010, p. 351) has described educational technology as 'fickle and faddish' and argued that, 'Like many technologies before them, the educational potentials of these Web 2.0 tools have attracted much enthusiasm, excitement, hope and—it must be said—a fair amount of hyperbole.'

Chaka (2011) argues that it is necessary to move away from pilot projects towards more longitudinal studies to evaluate the usefulness and effectiveness of Web 2.0 technologies and states that, 'They need to demonstrate their added value and effectiveness as media of choice to teaching and learning' (p. 54). Bax (2011) continues in this sceptical vein and concludes that, 'It is too easy to be seduced by apparently more friendly and more popular elements of education, which might be cheaper to provide and may get higher satisfaction ratings and wider smiles in the short term' (p. 255).

The ever increasing growth and speed of the internet has massively increased on-line language learning (see, for example, Levy & Stockwell, 2006; Recker, Dorward, & Nelson, 2004; Warschauer & Grimes, 2007), and the recent emergence of SNSs designed specifically for language learning has transformed this environment by providing enriched opportunities for synchronous and asynchronous interaction (Brick, 2011). Furthermore, new apps for mobile devices by the two market leaders, Livemocha and Busuu, now enable learners to access and synchronise SNS language learning whenever and wherever they wish.

SNSs for language learning are examples of what Godwin-Jones (2005) describes as 'disruptive technologies' as they allow learners to undertake familiar tasks in new and different ways. One of the features enables

learners to engage in language exchange via video-conferencing with native speakers of their target language. The peer review feature is equally ground breaking, allowing learners to correct each other's written submissions on the site. Another affordance of SNSs for language learning is the critical mass of hundreds of thousands of learners on-line throughout the day and night, making it extremely likely that learners can find language exchange partners with relative ease.

The precise characteristics of SNSs for language learning vary. Some sites serve primarily as a repository for learning materials, including contributions from members (<http://www.italki.com>), others allow teachers to register and offer lessons via a learning platform (<http://www.learn2lingo.com>). A few (Busuu and Livemocha) offer both learning materials and a platform for networking and language exchange.

In order for foreign language teachers to harness the full potential of these sites in their teaching, and to offer informed advice to learners regarding their suitability for autonomous language learning, it is important that they understand how these sites function and what their strengths and weaknesses are. However, Wang (2012, p. 32) highlights the fact that some teachers, although comfortable using technology for their own use, may face challenges using it appropriately in teaching.

There have been several studies aimed at establishing the affordances of SNSs for language learning including the quality of the learning materials but most of these have focused on Livemocha rather than Busuu. Harrison and Thomas's (2009) investigation was generally positive; it focused on a small group of learners who concluded 'that SNSs such as Livemocha offer to transform language learning, by providing environments that allow new modes of active learning' (p. 121). Clark and Guba's (2010) autoethnographic study of Livemocha concluded on a negative note, however, challenging assumptions that the site was 'addictive and effective' (p. 64). Brick's (2011) research focused on a small group of learners

who used Livemocha to learn a language of their choice. The learners logged their experiences and participated in group interviews. Overall, they reported positive experiences, but the poor quality of the learning materials was continuously highlighted as a major weakness. Pibworth, Brick, and Orsini-Jones' (2011) study focussed on the grammar activities available in Busuu and concluded that:

"In a way, the fact that each user becomes a teacher could provide a role-reversal model of grammar learning and teaching, where grammar is negotiated by users in a globally connected world and the boundaries between teachers and learners, tutors and tools, local and global pedagogies and traditional grammar learning exercises and CMC-based grammar-correction exchanges become more blurred." (p. 23)

There have also been extensive reviews of Livemocha and Busuu by the bloggers 'Fluent in 3 months' (2010) and 'Street Smart Language Learning' (2010). Further reviews have also been carried out by Jee and Park (2009) and Liaw (2011).

There are numerous practical considerations for practitioners to consider regarding the potential integration of SNSs into the classroom. These include the lack of control tutors have over the curricula, and the fact that language courses being taught by multiple tutors who do not necessarily co-ordinate their lesson planning. In addition, wider problems exist, including a lack of qualified learning technologists with experience of Web 2.0 technologies and the technical difficulties facing those with institutional responsibility for integrating externally produced and maintained tools (Conole & Alevizou, 2010, p.84). Furman, Goldberg, and Lusin (2007) have also pointed out that introductory level learners, who form the majority of language learners taking language courses on university wide language programmes, may lack the advanced pragmatic knowledge necessary to understand the messages on SNS sites.

The international *Horizon Report* (Johnson et al., 2009) identified the following three trends as key drivers of technology adoption in Higher Education between 2010 and 2015:

- The abundance of online resources and relationships, inviting a rethink of the educators' role.
- An increased emphasis on ubiquitous, just-in-time, augmented, personalised and informal learning.
- Greater collaboration between students.

Interestingly, all of these three points relate to SNSs for language learning and they are even more pertinent if we consider the additional affordances offered by the Busuu, Apple and Android apps. The apps allow learners to access a restricted version of the site on their smart phones which means they can practise their target language whenever they please.

Busuu.com: How does it Work?

As described above, most studies up until now have focused on Livemocha rather than Busuu which is the second largest SNS for language learning with over 5 million members, compared to Livemocha with approximately 10 million members worldwide. Although they are broadly comparable in terms of their functionality the interfaces differ and there are subtle differences in the way they operate. Busuu registration is free and allows members basic access to 9 different languages: English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, German, Russian, French, Polish, and Turkish. Premium content can be accessed by paying between \$8.00 and \$21.00 depending on the plan you choose. Although Livemocha's membership is far bigger than Busuu's, the number of visitors to Busuu's website recently passed the number of those visiting Livemocha.com. This suggests that it might have a far higher active membership than its main competitor D.Araneda (personal communication, May 13, 2011).

The site is divided into five parts: Home, Vocabulary, Dialogue, Writing, Talk, and

Figure 1. Home (© 2011, Busuu. Used with permission.)



Review. In the Vocabulary section (Figure 1) learners can keep track of their progress; view their reward points; monitor their recent activity; view the work they have submitted for peer review and access requests from other community members to review their work.

The Home page (Figure 1) provides a list of the courses the learner is currently taking; an animated garden which grows as the learner accumulates 'Busuu berries' for successfully completing units and correcting members' written submissions; and tool bars for navigation around the site.

The Vocabulary page contains a number of pictures which illustrate single vocabulary items

and key phrases which contain them. Clicking on a word provides the learner with the correct pronunciation (Figure 2).

The dialogue page puts the vocabulary in context and offers the opportunity for the learner to see an L1 translation. The dialogue is then followed by three multiple choice comprehension questions which the learner is encouraged to answer correctly before proceeding (Figure 3).

The Writing screen encourages learners to submit a piece of writing for peer review to the Busuu community. When learners click on the submit button another screen appears giving them the option of selecting five Busuu mem-

Figure 2. Vocabulary (© 2011, Busuu. Used with permission.)



bers to submit their text to. Alternatively, they can select 'Submit and notify friends' which sends the submission to friends they have made on the site. Once the learner has submitted their text they are immediately prompted to reciprocate by correcting a submission from another learner (Figure 4).

Once the learner has completed the writing section they are encouraged to practise speaking with a community member who is fluent in their target language (Figure 5). By clicking on the icon representing a particular learner, video conferencing software within Busuu is automatically launched. The software provides the opportunity for voice and text chat with the

selected Busuu member and includes easily accessible support materials and prompts.

The Review tab (Figure 6) tests learners on their understanding of the learning unit they have just completed. The test materials are solely based on the contents of the unit and test reading, writing and listening skills with drag and drop exercises; short dictations; and multiple choice listening comprehension questions.

Learners are constantly prompted to make friends with other learners on the site in much the same way as they would on other SNSs such as Facebook. This friendship is supposed to offer mutual benefits to both parties as they can engage in language exchange and provide

Figure 3. Dialogue (© 2011, Busuu. Used with permission.)

The screenshot shows the Busuu.com website interface. At the top is a navigation bar with links for Premium, Events, Tour, Feedback, Settings, Help, and Logout. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with links for Home, Friends, Inbox (4), Courses, Groups, and busuutalk On, along with a search bar. A banner area features a tree icon, a person icon, and the text 'Willkommen!'. Below the banner is a section titled 'Zwei neue Studenten treffen sich in der Universität.' (Two new students meet at the university). This section includes a table of brain improvement games with categories like Memory, Spatial Reasoning, Focus, Fluid Intelligence, Reaction Time, Attention, Problem Solving, Speed, Stress, and Visual Perception. Below the games are three images: two people sitting on grass, a hand gesture, and a group of people sitting on grass. The main content area displays a German dialogue between Peter and Julia. The dialogue is presented in two columns, with Peter's lines on the left and Julia's lines on the right. The dialogue is as follows:

Peter: Hallo! Ich heiße Peter.
Julia: Hallo, Peter! Ich freue mich, dich kennenzulernen. Ich heiße Julia.
Peter: Wie? Gula?
Julia: Nein, Julia. J-U-L-I-A.
Peter: Ah, Julia! Ich freue mich, dich kennenzulernen.
Julia: Es freut mich auch.
Zwei Tage später treffen sie sich in der Cafeteria der Universität.
Peter: Guten Morgen, Julia! Wie geht es dir?

On the right side of the dialogue, there are several lines of text that appear to be a transcription or a list of phrases related to the dialogue, including: 'Peter: Hello, my name's Peter.', 'Julia: Hello Peter. Nice to meet you. My name's Julia.', 'Peter: Sorry? Gula?', 'Julia: No, Julia. J-U-L-I-A.', 'Peter: Oh, Julia. Nice to meet you.', 'Julia: Nice to meet you too.', 'Two days later, they meet in the university cafe.', 'Peter: Good morning Julia, how are you?', and 'Julia: Fine, and you?'.

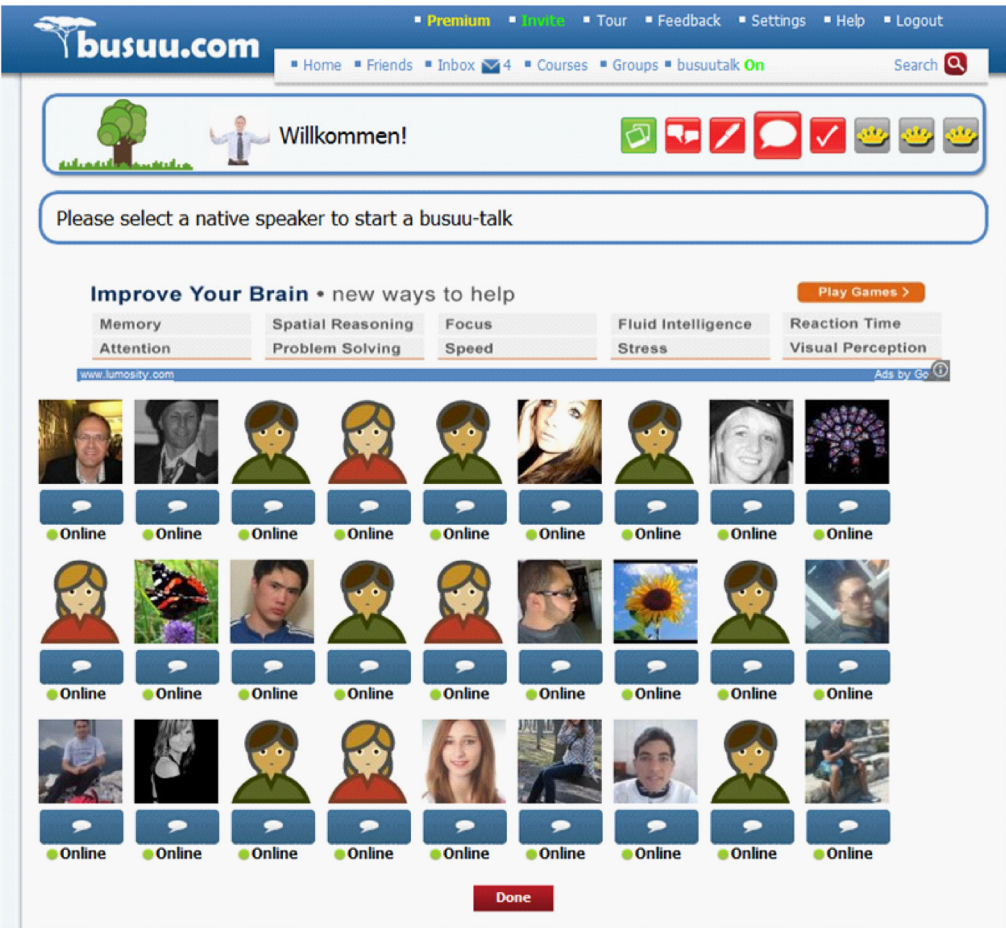
feedback for each other's oral or written work. Peer review is at the centre of the design of the site, and 'Busuu Berries' are awarded to members who review the written submissions of other Busuu members. 'Fluent in 3 months' (2010), a blogger who has used Busuu, is positive about the peer review system:

"The best thing would be to get to know other users and to come to a mutual agreement about helping one another... The fact that you can find such people eager to help you within the system is a huge plus."

The University and Corporate Platform

As HE and corporate clients are a potentially lucrative market for SNNs, Busuu have developed a platform within the site, designed specifically to allow a tutor to monitor learners' activities (Figure 7 through Figure 9). The platform attempts to provide a forum within which a particular cohort of learners can utilise the learning materials available on the site but also take advantage of the social networking features.

Figure 5. Talk (© 2011, Busuu. Used with permission.)



final figure indicating how many mistakes in total a learner has made is also provided.

Once a classroom has been set up and the learners' names have been added to it, the tutor is able to see the class ranking (Figure 8 and Figure 9). Tutors also have the opportunity to download the statistics into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet (Figure 9).

The site also hosts numerous discussion forums where members can post messages about language learning topics. The affordances of this element were not considered in this study.

THE STUDY

As the demand for SNSs for language learning continues apace, it is imperative that practitioners understand their affordances and whether they have a role to play in Higher Education language learning. This raises a number of general questions for HE practitioners: does Busuu, and the university platform within it, have a role to play in UK HE? Should we attempt to integrate such sites into the curriculum or are they just another tool that learners can

Figure 6. Review (© 2011, Busuu. Used with permission.)



utilise to practise their language autonomously outside the classroom?

The specific questions this paper seeks to answer are as follows:

1. How easy is it to access and use the Busuu site and the university platform?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the syllabus and activities available on the site?
3. What were the reactions of the participants to the social networking and peer review elements of the site?

The practitioners were also asked whether they would consider integrating Busuu into their teaching and how the site could be improved.

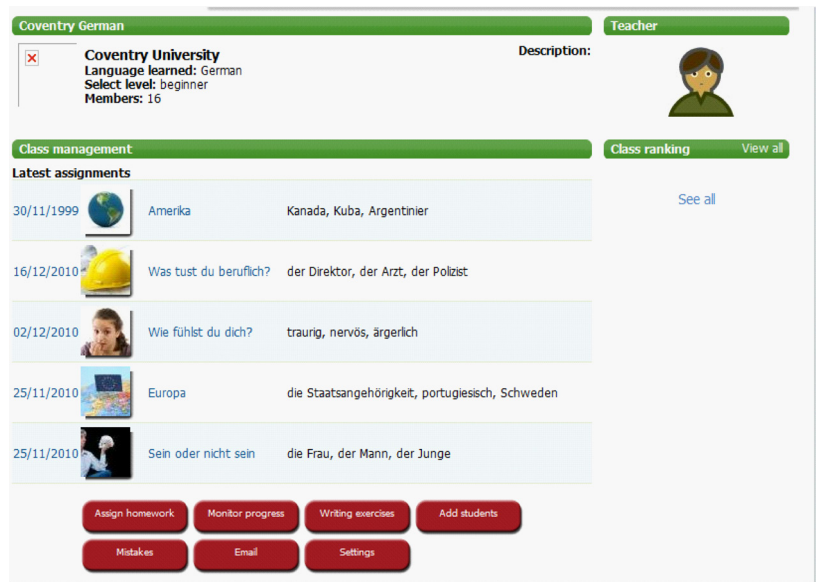
Methods

Study 1—Teacher Participants

The 15 participants were all higher education language teaching practitioners who attended a workshop at the Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies Subject Centre annual eSymposium held in Southampton in January 2011. Participants spent 3 hours on Busuu learning how it worked and discussed its strengths and weaknesses. Their views were noted and further data was collected using a slightly edited version of the student questionnaire, which participants completed at the end of the workshop.

The following section is a summary of the comments and evaluations collected from the

Figure 7. Teacher home screen (© 2011, Busuu. Used with permission.)



participants of both studies. The combination of regular log sheets, completed immediately after the student participants had visited Busuu, discussions during the scheduled meetings and the results of the final questionnaires provided a rich variety of data.

Study 2—Student Participants

The participants were 14 undergraduate learners from various L1 backgrounds who were either taking, or had taken, courses in English, French and Spanish. The learners spent 3 months using Busuu to learn German. Some of the learning took place in the classroom and was then

Figure 8. Teacher monitoring screen (© 2011, Busuu. Used with permission.)

User	BTALK	COURS	SENT	RECVD	CORRE	GRPL2	GRPL3	CTEST	LUREV	CREV1	CREV2	LUPRT	LIVEU	ENDLU	OTHER	VOTES	INVIT	GAME	FTEST	GOAL	Total
	0	0	0	0	80	0	0	50	0	0	0	220	0	180	0	0	0	65	0	0	560
	0	0	0	0	50	0	0	0	0	0	0	185	0	140	0	0	0	50	0	0	410
	5	0	0	0	165	0	0	0	0	0	0	120	0	80	0	0	0	0	0	0	380
	15	0	0	0	90	0	0	0	5	0	0	160	0	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	375
	0	0	0	0	125	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	80	0	0	0	0	0	0	315
	10	0	0	0	165	0	0	0	0	0	0	90	0	40	0	0	0	0	0	0	310
	10	0	0	0	60	0	0	0	0	0	0	115	0	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	205

Figure 9. Key to monitoring screen (© 2011, Busuu. Used with permission.)

Legend			
COURS	Finished courses	SENT	Berries sent to other users
RECVD	Berries received from other users	CORRE	Corrections
GRPL2	Leader of 1 active group	GRPL3	Leader of 2 or more active groups
LUREV	Learning Unit review	CREV1	Custom review - 10 questions
CREV2	Custom review - 20 questions	LUPRT	Learning unit part
LIVEU	Live Unit	ENDLU	Finish a unit
OTHER	Other	VOTES	Positive comments on a correction
INVIT	Friends invited	GAME	Games won
FTEST	Final course tests	GOAL	Achieved a goal
		Click here to export	

continued at home. The study followed their interactions in the Busuu language learning SNS, adopting a repeated measures design and eliciting multiple samples from the same learners over a three month period, from October to December 2010. The data was collected via log sheets which participants filled in every time they used Busuu outlining which activities they had completed and their reflections on these activities. Scheduled sessions were also held during which common issues were identified and discussed (Table 1).

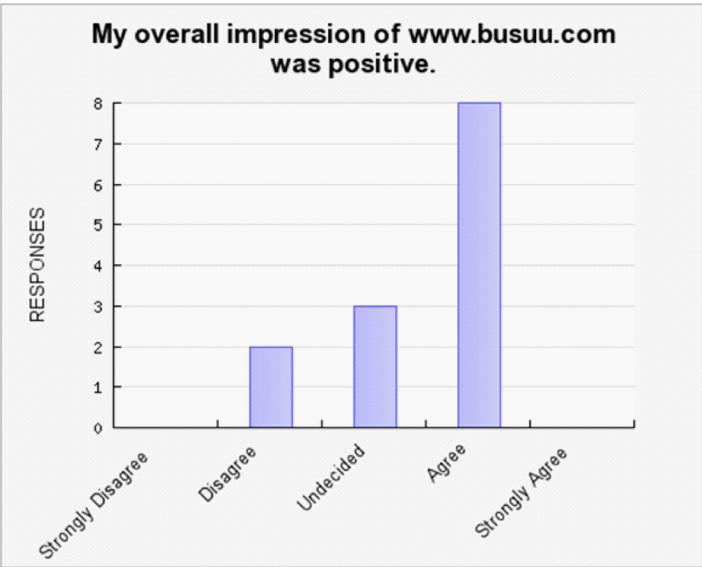
In order to familiarize students with the various functions of Busuu, an introductory session was held in which the various features were demonstrated and the aims of the study

were explained. The participants were required to fill in a log sheet each time they visited the site and they also spent 30 minutes each week on the site during scheduled classroom sessions. Notes were also taken as they discussed their experiences. Group interviews were also carried out in order to collect data. This form of data collection allows for discussions to develop, thus yielding a wider range of responses and causes minimum disruption (Watts & Ebbutt, 1987). The research included the premium content on the site which was provided by Busuu for the duration of the study. Participants were simply asked to use the site, and did not receive specific instructions to concentrate on particular features. Participants also completed

Table 1. Participants

Participant Number	Gender	Mother Tongue	Log Sheets Completed
1	Female	English	12
2	Male	Greek	13
3	Male	Spanish	17
4	Female	English	18
5	Female	English	16
6	Female	English	14
7	Female	English	12
8	Female	English	14
9	Female	English	11
10	Male	English	14
11	Female	English	14
12	Female	English	14

Figure 10. Overall impression of Busuu (learners)

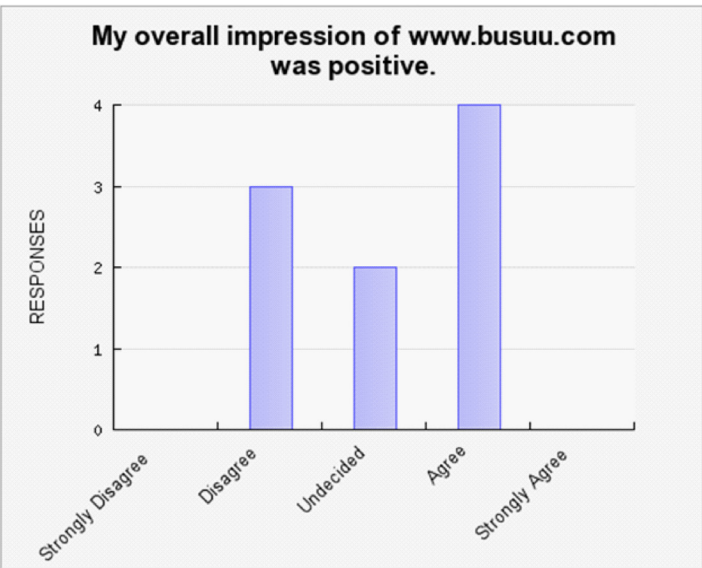


an online questionnaire (SurveyShare, <http://www.surveymshare.com/>) at the end of the study which included a combination of Likert scale statements and open ended questions.

RESULTS

The results will be presented in the following way:

Figure 11. Overall impression of Busuu (practitioners)



1. Likert scale results;
2. Results from observations log sheets and open-ended questionnaires organized thematically.

Figure 10 and Figure 11 show the responses of the two groups to the statement, 'My overall impression of <http://www.busuu.com> was positive.' Both groups tended to agree with the statement but agreement was far more pronounced in the student group than the practitioner group. Nobody in either group strongly agreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

Figure 12 and Figure 13 show their responses to a similar statement regarding their attitude toward the Busuu platform being used to complement traditional language teaching in HE. The most popular response in both groups was 'undecided' but almost as many practitioners either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. The learners were less enthusiastic, and more of them disagreed than agreed with the statement. None of the learners either strongly disagreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

A statement regarding the affordability of the premium content (Figure 14 and Figure 15) on Busuu elicited quite different responses from the two groups. Approximately two thirds of students either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement whilst practitioners' views were more divided.

The final statement (Figure 16 and Figure 17) asked the two groups whether they would continue to use Busuu in the future. This question produced contrasting responses with only 22% of learners stating that they would do, opposed to 62% of practitioners.

Syllabus

Three of the practitioners commented on the level of the language exercises on the site. One stated that 'they were not suitable for students of 'A' level quality' and two others suggested that there should be 'exercises and activities for levels above B2' and that, 'It would be good to

have levels C1 and C2 as well'[on the Common European Framework of Reference] (Council of Europe, 2001).

Amongst the learners there was only one complaint regarding the levels of the available materials. Participant 1 complained that she could not 'go past intermediate level.'

With regard to materials design two of the practitioners commented that they were concerned about the lack of authenticity. One participant stated that they would like to see, 'More natural pronunciation and dialogues reflecting current and authentic use of language. Dialogues were stilted and over-articulated, often with the same voice playing two parts.' Another practitioner concurred with this view criticising the formality, authenticity and appropriacy of the language to the image.

Another practitioner was particularly scathing with regard to the general appearance of the characters used on Busuu:

"I disliked the fact that all the fictional characters in the lessons I accessed (German and French level 1) were all very good-looking/ beautiful mainly young and very well-groomed. I think that this gives an unrealistic, monolithic and boring look to the site and lock out young people/children who do not look perfect - please let us see the wide diversity of real humankind a bit more!"

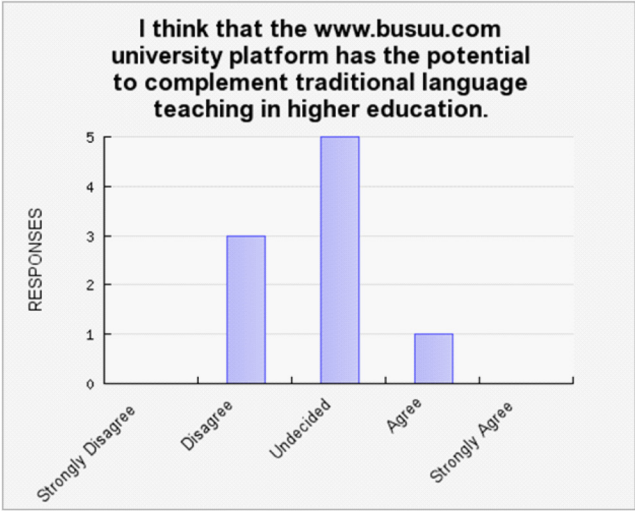
Feedback

Both groups had strong views about the value of peer feedback on the site (Table 2).

Reward System and Class Ranking

There were two divergent attitudes towards 'Busuu Berries' and the class ranking system. The practitioners all expressed indifference, in sharp contrast to the learners who were generally positive and in two cases extremely so. Participant 8 reported that she found the award of 'Busuu berries' very motivational, whilst Participant 11 stated that she was extremely

Figure 12. Potential of the university platform (learners)



pleased with the Busuu Berries reward system and stated that she enjoyed competing with her peers.

DISCUSSION

Both groups of participants reported both negative and positive reactions to using Busuu.

Figure 10 and Figure 11 show that both groups tend to have an overall positive impression, however more learners (61.5%) than practitioners (44.4%) agreed with the statement, ‘My overall impression of Busuu was positive.’ None of the participants from either study stated that they either disagreed strongly or agreed strongly with the statement. However, when both groups were asked whether they intended

Figure 13. Potential of the university platform (practitioners)

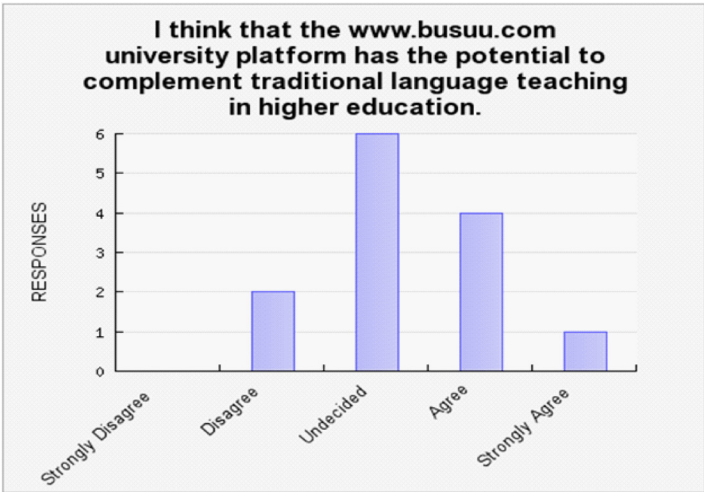


Figure 14. Affordability of Busuu (learners)

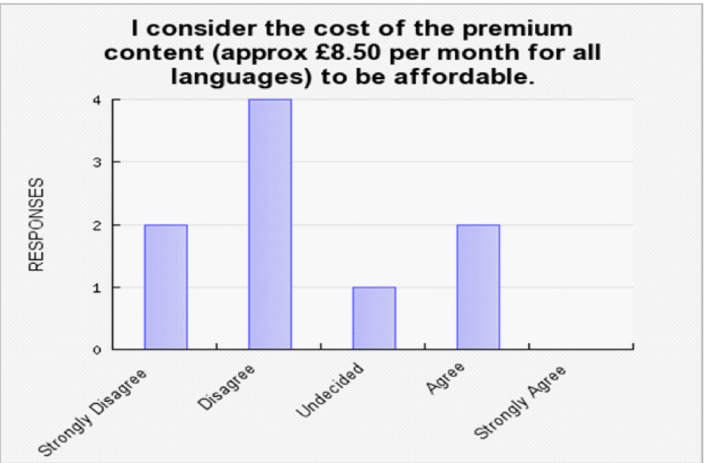
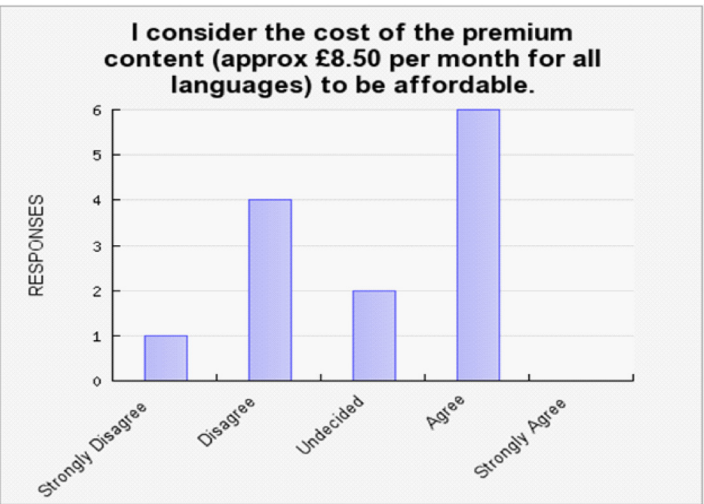


Figure 15. Affordability of Busuu (practitioners)



to continue using Busuu in the future the results were the reverse with 62% of practitioners stating that they would whilst only 22% of learners had the same intention (Figure 16 and Figure 17). One possible explanation for this apparent ambiguity could be that the learners had spent far longer exposed to Busuu and had become bored compared to the practitioners, who had only spent a few hours and may still have regarded Busuu as a novelty. Murray and

Barnes (1998) referred to this phenomenon as the ‘wow’ factor, a term they used to describe a lack of objectivity in teachers evaluating language learning software packages.

Responses to the question whether or not Busuu has the potential to complement traditional approaches to language teaching vary considerably. The majority answer from both groups was undecided: practitioners 46.1% and learners 55%. This shows that practitioners were

Table 2. A summary of practitioners' and learners' views on peer feedback (The comments have been paraphrased. The numbers indicate how many times the same point was made by the participants.)

Learners	Practitioners
Positive	Positive
Rapid response from the correctors (2).	Rapid response from the correctors (2).
Being asked to correct somebody else's work (2).	Being asked to correct somebody else's work.
Receiving feedback from peers.	Receiving feedback from peers.
Negative	Negative
Being confident enough to mark.	Some of the corrections were wrong (3).
	Lack of quality control.

overall more positive about Busuu's university platform than learners were. The reasons for this, however, remain unclear.

There were divergent answers regarding the affordability of Busuu. This is not surprising given the likelihood of income differentials between the two groups. Three of the practitioners commented on the level of the language exercises on the site with particular reference to the absence of materials suitable for learners at level C1 and C2 on the CEFR. However, none of the participants suggested that the profile matching feature would allow learners to search for appropriate language

exchange partners with whom they could speak with using the video conferencing feature. This facility is available to learners without the need for premium membership.

One practitioner was particularly critical of the characters used in the dialogues noting that they were not representative of a diverse society. None of the students made reference to this.

Brick (2011) considered the value of the peer feedback facility and suggested that learners need to invest some time to build up a reliable network of friend on the site, a view echoed by 'Street-Smart Language Learning' (2010) and 'Fluent in 3 months' (2010). Both practitioners

Figure 16. Use of Busuu in the future (students)

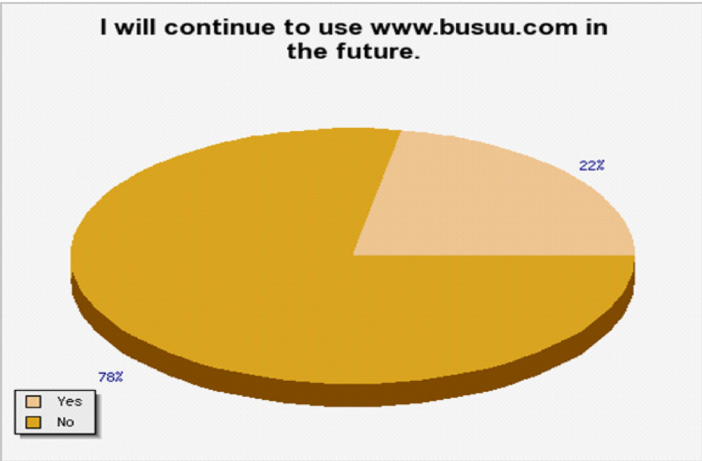
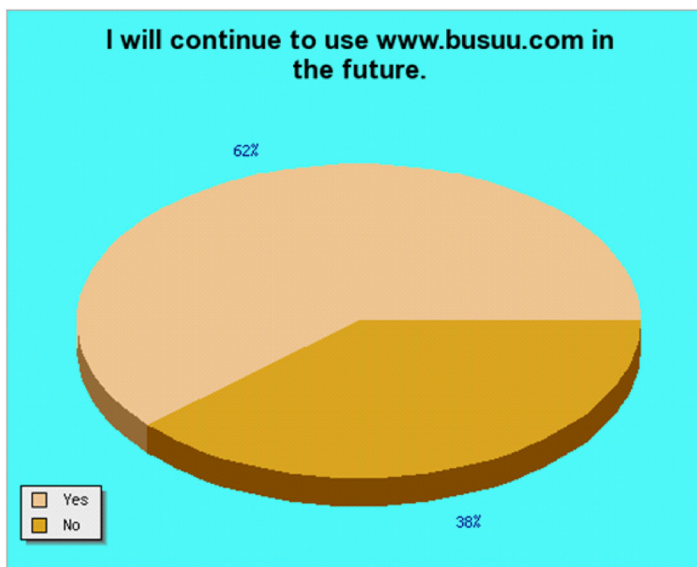


Figure 17. Use of Busuu in the future (practitioners)



and learners were, on the whole, complementary about the peer feedback although the practitioners expressed more reservations with regard to accuracy and quality control.

Another of Brick's (2011) findings was the regular incidence of cyber-flirting (Whitty & Gavin, 2001; Vie, 2007). However, during this study neither learners nor practitioners mentioned this as an issue. Further study is needed in this area to ascertain whether or not this constitutes a real implementation problem.

The majority of both groups were undecided about the potential of the HE platform although more practitioners than learners expressed a positive view. Perhaps the reason for this is because this feature of the site is in its infancy and will possibly become more sophisticated in the near future as Busuu attempt to challenge the dominance of software providers such as *Rosetta Stone* and *Tell Me More* in the education and corporate markets. In fact, *Livemocha* have recently begun selling language learning coursebooks (Cook, 2011) which integrate with their online provision and include six months access to *Livemocha's* online premium features.

CONCLUSION

According to the *Harpercollins* website (2010) there are 375 million people worldwide who want to learn a language and it is estimated that the market is currently over \$80 billion. Given this huge demand it is likely that SNSs for language leaning are likely to increase in size and number in the foreseeable future and also diversify on to new platforms as smart phones become increasingly sophisticated. Busuu has recently released apps on both the Apple and Android platforms. The apps are free to download and link to your Busuu account.

The Busuu university platform represents an attempt to incorporate Web 2.0 principles into a language learning software environment with mixed results. As this paper is based on two small studies any conclusions are by definition tentative. To improve the validity of the findings and conclusions, a larger study needs to be carried out on a larger number of participants of different ages, levels and nationality. In spite of this, Busuu and other language learning SNSs provide the opportunity for learners to practise their oral skills with native speakers

of their target language and to receive almost immediate peer feedback on their submissions which was previously impossible.

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